

13 *The Impact of Capacity Expansion on Quality of Graduates in Institutions of Higher Learning in Nakuru*

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1 Abstract

For a long time now, Kenyan graduates from institutions of higher learning have been accused of incompetence and deficiency in vital experience needed in the job market. Whereas this could be disputed, worrying trends show that many such graduates are finding it increasingly difficult to secure jobs, while, at the same time, those seeking further education abroad are subjected to greater scrutiny. A question begging answer is whether Kenyans are getting trained for the right purposes and to acceptable levels of proficiency. Being a market-driven economy, the disconnect between education policy formulation and implementation and market consultation is worrying. This is especially so given the rapid expansion being witnessed in institutions of higher learning. Using a Qualitative Approach and Survey Methodology, it is here argued that this trend was responsible for the growing gap between theory and practice, and the diminishing command of research capability and analytical communication among graduates. It is also questioned, whether the expansion strategy in institutions of higher education is in tandem with human capital development for sustainable quality-assurance. This paper examines this phenomenon and recommends a need for a more effective regulative framework for institutions of higher learning. It proposes that for proper quality structures to be in place, there is need for wide stakeholder consultations and a paradigm shift from process-based management to results-based initiatives.

2 Statement of Problem and Discussion of its Significance

In a bid to satisfy the high demand for higher education in Kenya, many institutions of higher learning have incorporated expansion strategies into their operational framework. Expansion has taken the dimensions of expanding existing structures to accommodate more students, opening up new branches across the country, as well as collaborating with other private middle level colleges. In the last ten years there has been a significant increase in the number of institutions that have received accreditation from the CHE, especially in the private sector. An increase in the number of players has brought in competition dynamics with individual institutions fighting to control particular geographical niches. Despite the increased capacities in various institutions to accommodate new entrants, there is still a worrying trend of young people going through higher education but being unable to secure employment or being productive members of society. It is instructive therefore to consider that something is fundamentally wrong with our training system which, either does not produce the kind of graduates needed by the market or does not adequately prepare trainees for problem-solving in their areas of expertise. By evaluating the current situation, our education and training programme can be remodelled to reflect the demands of the market, hence position Kenya as a regional centre of research and development in new technologies, as envisioned in *The Kenya Vision 2030*.

3 Research Questions

1. Do institutional resources and procedures foster the growth of problem-solving and provide relevant opportunity for growth among students?
2. What environmental factors influence quality outcome in institutions of higher learning?
3. Do institutions' administrators and students think the same about quality in their institutions?

4 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

4.1 *Quality Defined*

In September 2005, India's Prime Minister stated that India's universities were falling behind their peers around the world and spoke of the need to make India's institutions of higher education and research world class (Rahman, 2005). The definition and inclusion of quality statements within the operations of institutions of higher learning need not be over emphasised. However, whereas actual definition of quality is relative due to autonomy of definition by institutions (UNESCO, 2006) it is in agreement that institutions of higher learning are obligated to pursue quality on behalf of their stakeholders. The Higher Education Colleges Association (HECA) in Britain, in ensuring an ethos of quality among its members, has set up and maintained world class standards in its member institutions (www.heca.ie). This ethos is manifest in and extends to all aspects of:

1. The quality and level of the courses provided.
2. The quality of course delivery.
3. The quality and fairness of assessment.
4. The quality of student support.
5. The quality of facilities and student resources.
6. The quality of opportunity (that is, the provision of opportunity to progress to higher qualifications or to secure employment commensurate with the qualification achieved at the member college).
7. The quality of redress (that is, the quality of protection of student's financial outlay – bonding of fees – and the quality of opportunity to continue study in another member college in the event of closure of the original college of enrolment - bonding of courses).

Each member college has quality policies and procedures approved by the various accrediting bodies whose courses they deliver. Members treat their fee-paying students as customers and provide a high level of customer care. Borrowing heavily from the above, this paper defines quality in the context of producing graduates who are able to solve problems in society using the theoretical frameworks achieved through in the course of their training. Quality is here defined as the provision of a conducive environment for the maximisation of knowledge gain and application for the trainee. The paper chooses to look at quality from the perspective of the nature of graduates produced, as opposed to the processes in place within institutions. It considers it from a results-based perspective as opposed to a process base.

4.2 *University Education in Kenya: A Brief History*

In Kenya, the need to regulate, coordinate and assure quality in higher education was felt as a result of the rapid growth and expansion experienced in the sub-sector prior to the establishment of the Commission for Higher Education in 1985. At independence in 1963, Kenya had an enrolment of 30,000 pupils in the 151 secondary schools available in the country at the time. The figure shot up to 600,000 pupils enrolled in 3,000 secondary schools which had been established by 1991. Yet during most of this period, there was only one university level institution in Kenya, the Nairobi University College, which between 1963 and 1970 had an enrolment of about 1,000 students. On becoming a fully fledged university in 1970, the University of Nairobi gradually increased its enrolment to 8,900 in 1984. This increased enrolment was partially achieved through the additional places offered at its two constituent colleges – Kenyatta University College and Egerton University College. The pressure on the Government to increase enrolment at the university was such that it became necessary to establish more universities. Following the recommendations of a Presidential Working Party, Moi University was established in 1984. Soon after Kenyatta University College and Egerton University College were elevated to full University status in 1985 and 1987 respectively. Enrolment in the four public universities increased steadily to about 20,000 students by 1989/90. University enrolment sky-rocketed with the 1990 intake of 21,450 students which increased the total enrolment

to 41,000 students. It was by now evident that the Government was no longer able to cope with the ever increasing demand for more university places or even to provide the adequate resources required.

The thirst for university education and opportunities in the sub-sector were not lost to the private sector. It is therefore not surprising that, between 1970 and 1984, ten privately-funded institutions offering university level education, mainly theological-based, were established. These institutions however, offered limited enrolment and few programmes. By 1994/95, private university institutions had increased to twelve with an enrolment of slightly more than 4,000 students, which was but a drop in the ocean of the high demand for university places. Consequently, Kenyans increasingly turned to foreign universities for university education. The number of Kenyan students in universities abroad has continued to grow every year. It was estimated, for instance, that there were 10,000 Kenyan students attending post secondary institutions abroad in 1991. This estimate increased to approximately 30,000 students in 1999 at a cost of Kshs 40 billion. It was against this background that CHE was established in 1985 through an Act of Parliament (The Universities Act Cap 210b), to regulate growth and ensure quality in higher education in Kenya.

The establishment of other public universities, JKUAT 1994: Maseno University, 2000, and the Western University College of Science and Technology (WEUCST) 2002 was a further attempt to address the problem of the high demand in university education. In the meantime, the number of private university institutions also increased to 17 with an enrolment of nearly 9,000 students. By 2002, there were six private universities which were fully chartered by the Commission, five granted letters of Interim Authority and six registered by the Commission. In addition, public universities have introduced part time (Module II) degree programmes, which target both the public and private sector employees and school leavers. Consequently, enrolment in the entire university sector rose from 59,193 in 2000/2001 to 91,541 in 2004/2005 (CHE, 2009). The inclusion of self-sponsored university degree programmes were a major boost to the income levels of public universities (Kiamba, 2003) with increased enrolment and funds to support university programmes.

4.3 Coordination of Post-Secondary School Institutions

The Universities Act, 1985, gives mandate to the Commission to coordinate education and training courses offered in post secondary school institutions for purposes of higher education and university admission. In this respect, the Commission developed and published in *The Kenya Gazette* "The Universities (Co-ordination of Post Secondary School Institutions for University Education) Rules, 2004."

"The 2004 Universities Rules" provide for:

1. Validation of academic programmes of post secondary school institutions by the Commission.
2. Granting authority to a post secondary school institutions, whose programme has been validated, to collaborate with other institutions or universities for purposes of offering such programmes of those institutions or universities.
3. Preparation by the Commission of course standards for co-ordination of programmes of post secondary school institutions.

5 Methodology and Data Analysis

This research followed the **Survey Design**. **Questionnaires** were issued to respondents, followed up by **Personal Interview**.

The survey sampled 50 students drawn at random from institutions of higher learning based in Nakuru. These included public and private universities and institutions collaborating with other private and public universities. The study was undertaken in Nakuru because of the richness of the sample, Nakuru being an epicentre for academic institutions competition. A total of ten institutions were sampled, with five students from each filling in the questionnaires.

The data has been presented simply as percentages of number of students who answered according to a certain attribute in the questionnaire.

6 Discussion

Less than 50 percent of the respondents believe they are training for the courses of their dreams or that their courses are marketable. They also seem to have employment as their major drive for pursuing higher education. Paradoxically, over 50 percent actually did not know the academic credentials of their tutors. Given the above scenario, there is a possibility that the mix of students who do not believe they are doing the courses they consider they have aptitude for and interest in, and the fact that their vision is limited to employment, not job-creation, produces graduates who are misplaced in the job market.

In the Table 1 below, over half of the respondents were either not satisfied or were unsure about their satisfaction with their lecturers' availability for consultation beyond class. Most of the respondents indicated that they were taught by lecturers who had other teaching and consultancy engagements outside their institutions, hence these lecturers were only available during normal class time. Cases were also reported where timetables were changed to suit availability of these tutors. For instance, a lecturer could miss most of his monthly lessons only to lump them up together in one or two days. This, added to the fact that most students interviewed had a negative perception about the availability of learning resources like relevant and most recent books and journal publications, could explain the observations that most students were not well developed critical thinkers and that their research capacities were ranging from below-average to average.

Table 1: Learning Environment Analysis (Percent No. of Students).

	Below 3	3	Above 3
Are you satisfied with your lecturers' availability for consultation beyond class?	60	20	20
The college administration is very supportive to students	70	20	10
I am satisfied with the availability of academic resources for my course, that is, books, computers, among others.	60	30	10
My college has a functioning student development office	68	24	8
Guest speakers are frequently invited from industry to add value to our training	60	26	14
My course adequately prepares me to be an entrepreneur	40	40	20
My course sufficiently prepares me to be a researcher and problem-solver.	30	50	20

Some respondents noted that they did not have a student development office, and for those that had, they were either ill-equipped to deal with student issues or were totally inactive in creating opportunity for student development. Hence the contact of the students with external forces that could influence their career development was minimal and, unless a student took individual initiative to seek out such opportunities, they would simply not have adequate exposure to them.

The above results also point to a worrying trend in the higher education field where concern for revenue collection supersedes the service offered to the fee-payers (customers). Over 80 percent felt that their institutions' management were not sensitive to their plight as students, and that the only thing that tied them together was the financial obligation which however was also not well utilised to serve the students better.

Table 2: Institution Process Analysis (percentage No. of students).

	Below 3	3	Above 3
Do you think student admissions are based on competence?	6	40	54
How would you rate student support programmes in your institution?	64	14	22
Does your institution offer bursaries or any form of financial assistance to needy students?	70	20	10
Do you think your examinations are set and marked fairly?	40	40	20

Table 2 above shows that just about 10 percent of the respondents believe that their institutions extended financial assistance of some sort to their needy students, despite the fact that over 50 percent of their population came from struggling backgrounds. Once again the respondents felt here that they received very little, if any, support from their institutions in helping them develop to become professionals.

7 Conclusions and Implications

The results of the survey portray interesting (though not unexpected) findings.

The first observation is that most institutions of higher learning are their own enemies in the pursuance of quality. Though most of them have quality statements quoted in their various mission statements, very few respondents think that their institutions practice these principles. As long as there is no point of confluence between the two perceptions, quality may not really be achieved. Quality should be seen and defined through the eye and mental processes of the recipients of the services offered.

It is arguable that education should not be more about receiving credentials than learning. Though the expansion of educational opportunity is essential, this must not be at the expense of dumbing down what is being offered. Opening up of higher education without a concomitant expansion of spending leads to a downward pressure on academic salaries, degraded facilities and a devalued learning experience. Brain drain due to exit of lecturers in search of better pay and opportunities to European countries, or greater commitment to enterprise than to research is detrimental to the production of quality graduates.

Given this scenario, there is urgent need for an effective regulatory framework that will check the operations of institutions of higher learning to bind them to certain standards. The current observation is that the CHE is not fully capacitated to regulate the industry players, with their role being felt mainly during the college registration process. The relevant ministries concerned with aspects of education also need to consult to ensure quality is not watered down. For instance, though the official CHE website indicate that only ten post secondary school institutions have received the CHE's recognition to collaborate with accredited institutions in offering courses on a collaboration basis, there are in existence many such collaborations with private commercial colleges registered under the Ministry of Education. Whereas there is nothing inherently wrong with this, the question begging answer is, who is ultimately responsible for quality delivery of such programmes? Internal

regulation in this case, is not sufficient, due to the profit factor. Bipartite regulation is also out of question because of vested interests of the parties concerned.

The survey revealed that most learning institutions do not provide the best environment to enhance the learning experience of trainees. Institutions of higher learning should be obligated to provide a relevant and adequate environment to produce the kind of professionals that Kenya needs today. Research experience and entrepreneurship development should not be approached as independent programmes but as integral parts of every existing curriculum. What is needed is to see entrepreneurship and research in such areas as sciences, engineering, business, raw material processing, and so on. Current lecturers need to be retrained or developed in such a manner that they teach from these two perspectives. After all, what is there to be proud of if we produce first class graduates, say in Botany and Zoology, who cannot be empowered to convert their schooling to profitable research and enterprise?

In considering this, it is also mandatory to consider the thorny issue of teaching and staff remuneration. The level of enthusiasm and motivation in the teaching staff has a great impact in the quality of graduates produced. This staff needs to be fairly compensated so that they spend most of their time serving the students within their institutions, as opposed to the current situation where various institutions are making use of the same lecturers. This spirit of enterprise is arguably detrimental to research development. If Kenya does not encourage research by its leading scholars, then we are on the brink of technological and industrial extinction, since we under utilise staff trained by so much of taxpayers' money. The same are contracted to develop solutions to other countries without the benefit of intellectual property rights.

8 References

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